

From *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*:  
 John of Ephesus and the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*,  
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## PREFACE

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The Mediterranean world of late antiquity has in recent years gained popularity with scholars and the lay public both. A lacuna has been present in our studies thus far, however, in the case of a major and compelling writer from this era, John of Ephesus. Living in the sixth century, John led a varied career as a Monophysite monk, missionary, writer, and church leader. Two significant works by John remain extant: his *Ecclesiastical History* and his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. John wrote in Syriac and his focus is often the eastern Byzantine provinces, especially his homeland Mesopotamia. But John's career took him throughout the empire of his day, and he knew the imperial court of Constantinople as intimately as he knew the villages of Amida's regions. John's writings are important in part because they concern a personal encounter with the full Byzantine world of his time, and in part because few writers from late antiquity have opened that world so vividly as he.

John lived through the period spanning the Monophysite movement's greatest successes and defeats. In his youth the Monophysites represented a formidable source of energy and creativity in the Byzantine realm; in his old age, John saw them not simply defeated but stalemated: discredited by the Chalcedonians on the Byzantine throne and incapacitated by their own internal bickerings. Within and beyond this frame of activity were the people of John's world. For John's home, the eastern provinces of Byzantium, the sixth century was above all a time of suffering. Their lands provided the battleground for war between Byzantium and Persia. Their monasteries and church communities, Monophy-

site in faith, endured persecutions by the Chalcedonian government. Famine and plague were chronically ubiquitous. It was a century when tragedy both accountable and capricious was the fabric of daily life.

John has received uneven treatment by modern scholars. Appreciation for his significance was first shown in the pamphlet by J. P. N. Land, *Joannes Bischof von Ephesos der erste syrische Kirchenhistoriker* (Leiden, 1856). Subsequent studies culminated in the monumental work of A. Djakonov, *Ioann Efesskiy* (Petrograd, 1908)—still the only monograph devoted to John. Further efforts followed, primarily textual, and critical editions of John's writings were published in the 1920s and 1930s, accompanied by translations into English for the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* and into Latin for the *Ecclesiastical History*. Nonetheless, John's works continued to be utilized mainly by Syriac scholars, while historians of the late Roman and early Byzantine periods persisted in sidestepping his contribution.

In recent decades, however, scholars of late antiquity have turned to a more comprehensive treatment of the materials available to us, and a greater appreciation for Syriac sources has been apparent. An upsurge in the interest shown for John of Ephesus' *Ecclesiastical History* has accompanied this wider view, and not least because John's records contrast with the contemporary accounts of the Greek literati.

For the most part, John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* have not shared the limelight. The *Lives* have been used primarily for the information they contain about certain key figures and events in the ecclesiastical crises of the sixth century. Such selective treatment bypasses both what John's *Lives* are about and what they have to offer—as may be seen in two notable exceptions to this situation, Peter Brown's "Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways" and Evelyn Patlagean's *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance 4e–7e siècle*.

This study is an attempt to bring John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* into view. They provide a different perspective from that of his *History*. Rather than a chronological record of important events, one finds here what is often lacking in such records: the daily world of ordinary people, and how they coped with war, plague, famine, and persecution. Here one sees, above all, Syrian asceticism fully developed. Its practitioners are at home in the small world of the villager, and sometimes, too, in the larger one of the imperial court. But the Syrian ascetics also reflected their times. By the end of the sixth century, even the vitality of this movement had been worn down.

John of Ephesus and his *Lives of the Eastern Saints* provide an opportunity to learn about life in a time and place of drastic events. Here we

can see the ways in which those who have chosen extreme lives are forced by external circumstances into extremities even more severe. In writing the stories of holy men and women whom he had known, John shows us the confrontation between extreme experience and the human necessity of shaping that experience through narrative.

The hesitation that scholars have shown in the instance of John's *Lives* in fact stems largely from its literary form. For despite John's personal acquaintance with his subjects, and despite his professed intention to record in the *Lives* only what he himself has seen or can verify, hagiography alters both an author's material and its presentation. The nature of hagiography does not invalidate the historicity of John's *Lives*, but it does require that we read the text with a particular understanding.

Hagiography is a literary genre in which form is as important as content in understanding the text. Its task is to render the world of human experience comprehensible. It does this in two ways: first, by celebrating the saint (whether real or legendary) as one through whom God acted in the realm of human life; and second, by using a standardized language of literary *topoi* that identified the saint as saint and interpreted the saint's work as that of divine agency. Recognizing the formulaic, non-historical language of hagiography opens the route for treating the standardization itself as historical material. These texts offer us historical information, even in the most stringent sense, only if we can ask the appropriate questions. Standardization in hagiographical language is not a static matter. Favorite themes change; and the criteria of sanctity itself change in accordance with fluctuations in the values of society. Standard hagiographical themes, their periods of fashion and forms of expression, reveal the subconscious concerns of their societies and serve to establish a larger sense of order for those whom they are written to guide.

How, then, can we approach hagiography so as to evaluate the interaction of formulaic and historical material? The text must be heard on its own terms as well as in its hagiographical context; one must separate the standardized material from the author's perspective and establish how and why the author is using the hagiographic medium. There are clues internal to the text: the author's style, emphases, choices and viewpoints, and the author's position as distinct from the subject's. There are also external clues by which to measure the internal evidence: other sources—hagiographical, archaeological, archival, historiographical—and other information can be brought to bear upon the text. The consistency and coherence of a text, the interplay between an author's intent and content, analyses of comparative and contrasting material—all of

these matters are tools by which we can listen more carefully to a text. In the listening, we can discern what the text is saying, and what we can learn from it.

John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints* is a work of hagiography in the historical rather than the legendary tradition of saints' lives. Unlike many works of this kind, John's collection is not primarily stereotyped or didactic. It is a work incorporating a strikingly personal element, as John not only participated in much of what he sets down but also is actively present in his role as author. In the present study, John himself stands at the center. As will be seen, his individualistic manner is constantly apparent; more than a matter of style, John produces a form of hagiography peculiarly his own. His circumstances do much to encourage his individuality.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship and interaction between asceticism and society in the sixth-century Byzantine East. In particular, we are concerned with how this relationship works for the Monophysite ascetics, what factors influenced it, and what the consequences and implications may have been.

How do we see the particular historical circumstances reflected in the ascetic experience John describes hagiographically? As John tells us, it was a time when stylites descended from their pillars to enter the arena of religious controversy; anchorites returned to towns and cities to care for the laity in the absence of exiled church leaders; exile became a part of monastic practice; the needs of the laity overrode the sentiments of bishops in the formation of a separate church hierarchy; and women took leadership roles they would otherwise have shunned. The situation of religious controversy was compounded by war with Persians, invasions by Huns, extended famine, bubonic plague, and collective hysteria. We can see the contrast of Mesopotamia in its calamity with the expansion and prosperity experienced elsewhere in the Byzantine Empire during the first half of the sixth century; we can see also the contrast of provincial life to that of the cosmopolitan centers, whether Antioch, Jerusalem, or Constantinople. Our goal here is to break the religious experience down into its component parts, in search of the meaning ascribed to the larger event.

Establishing the historicity of John's text is thus neither the methodology nor the point of this study, nor does it attempt to prove a thesis. Rather, it seeks to see a situation: What is the story John tells? How are we to understand it? This is not a book about John of Ephesus as a historian. I chose to write about his *Lives* because they are not the history of his time but rather the story of the people who live in his world. I will

utilize his *Ecclesiastical History* only as a complementary supplement to the *Lives*. My purpose is to understand what Syriac spirituality meant to these people, both those who practiced an ascetic career and those who did not.

Consequently, this is also not a book about the Monophysite movement, nor is its originating point of reference the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Rather, the point of origin is Syrian asceticism, its roots and development. In this particular instance, the ascetics are also Monophysites. While the church crisis colored their situation, as the book emphasizes, they are not themselves the entire Monophysite body (far from it), nor are they the reason for the separation of the churches. Their spirituality, their asceticism, and their responses to the crises of their times do not depend on their Monophysitism but rather on their Syriac heritage. The continuity of that heritage is ultimately more important than the change brought by persecution.

Because the material is generally unfamiliar to scholars and students of late antiquity, this study starts with an introduction to the Syrian Orient of the sixth century. I do this by focusing on particular texts that illustrate the themes important for John of Ephesus; there is a context in which the ascetic practice John records makes sense in practical as well as symbolical terms. Syrian asceticism did not develop through a sequence of events. It developed in a collective experience, in which individuals and communities pursued a variety of goals for various reasons. The people rather than the events were the determining factors, and they overlapped, clashed, and harmonized in patterns rather than in a clear progression. The same is true of the spirituality studied in this book. Events affected it and forced people to make certain decisions or changes; those circumstances are central to this study insofar as they reveal the people and their spirituality more clearly.

The first chapter then introduces John himself, his writings, and the literary issues of the *Lives*. The following chapters focus on those events that shaped John's collection: the development of asceticism in a time of crisis (chapter 2); the plague of madness in the city of Amida, as a collective societal response to the years of calamity (chapter 3); the impact of exile on monastic practice, and the functioning of monastic communities as refugee camps (chapter 4); mission, the breakdown of Byzantine imperial ideology in the East, and the formation of separate churches (chapter 5); the fluctuating position of women (chapter 6); and, finally, an assessment of John's hagiographical purpose (chapter 7).

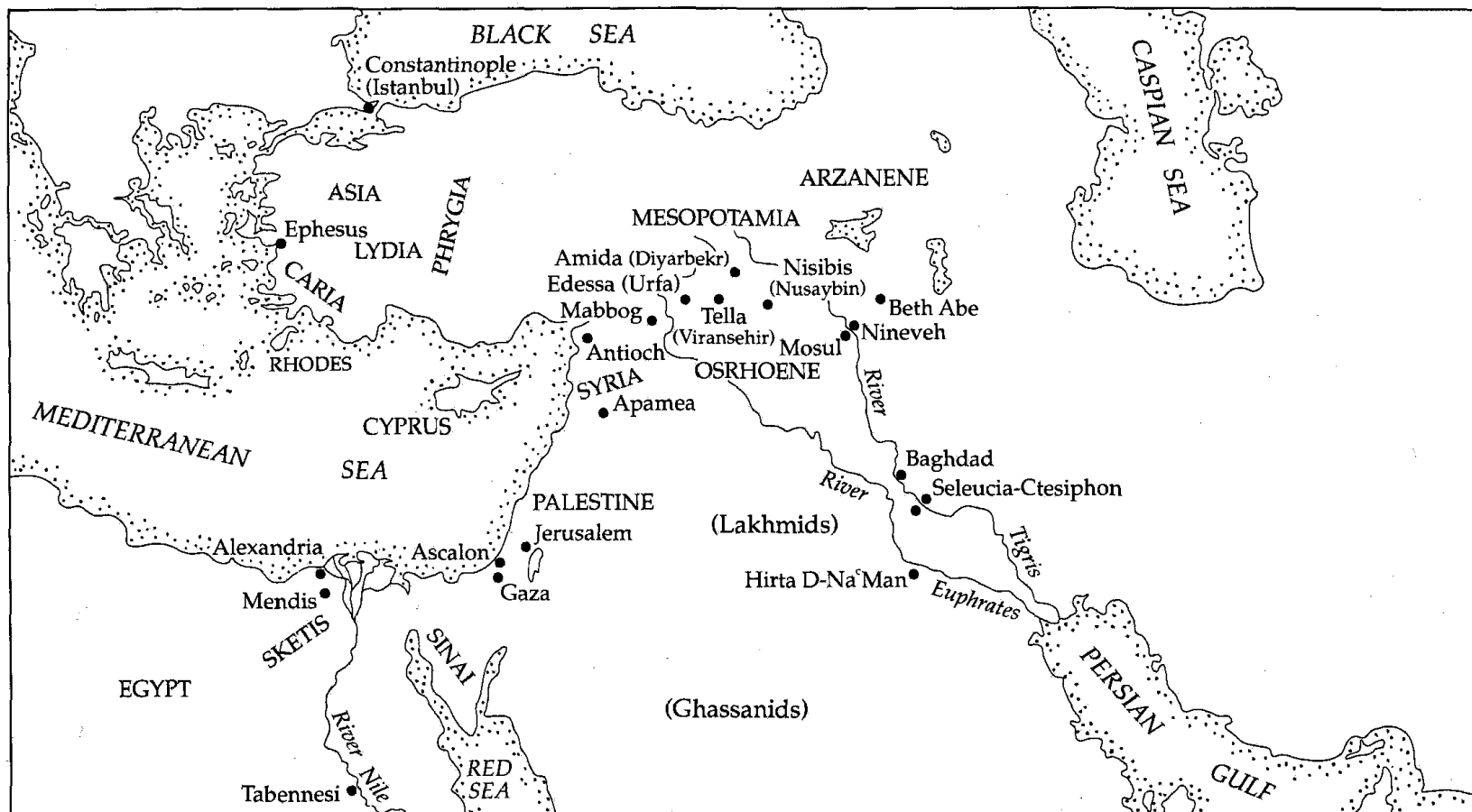
In using John's *Lives* to the end, we will work with the awareness that John is writing hagiography for a specific reason and with a specific

intent. In order to see what John is doing and how and why he does it, the *Lives* will be treated throughout this study together with contrasting and complementary writings of late antiquity, both Greek and Syriac. We will seek to clarify the singular experience contained in the work. These are particular people in a particular world. To see them on their own terms and to hear their story as truly theirs is to touch history as a living thing.

Hagiography is about a theology of activity. The careers of the saints are one expression of this theology. The writing of hagiography is another.

Since no one can speak for John of Ephesus better than he himself, I have illustrated this study with his own words as much as possible. For the most part I quote from the translation of E. W. Brooks, though occasionally I have altered the text or, where noted, substituted my own.





John of Ephesus's World

## · VI ·

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### SOME IMPLICATIONS: THE CASE OF WOMEN

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Thus far our focus has been on John's own understanding of what he was doing in the *Lives*, from inside the ethos pervading the Mesopotamian communities whether in their own country or elsewhere. By the same token, John enables us to assess his own ascetic vision and the conditions contributing to it. The women in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* provide material by which to look at these points from a different perspective. John's presentation of women raises the issue of how far he is willing to depart from convention when confronting the Monophysite crisis of his day and, further, what the implications of his concern for expediency in such circumstances might be. Because the case of women is specific in its own right, it requires its own treatment.

### WOMEN, THE EARLY CHURCH, AND THE SYRIAN ORIENT

It is clear from our sources that earliest Christianity granted women an unusual scope for religious activity. Women were part of the group that traveled with Jesus and provided much of the financial support for his band of followers.<sup>1</sup> They participated in the Jesus movement as disciples rather than as serving women.<sup>2</sup> There is evidence both inside the canonical New Testament and outside of it that women held leadership

positions in the earliest Christian communities and were also teaching, prophesying, and sometimes even baptizing converts.<sup>3</sup>

But our sources also indicate a strain imposed by this fact. The Deutero-Pauline writings, for example, with their injunctions that women be silent and submissive,<sup>4</sup> are strident to the point that they can only be reacting to a situation quite different from what they demand. Although the church insisted from the start that women and men stood equal before the Lord—citing Paul's statement that in Christ there is neither male nor female<sup>5</sup>—this view was not used to question the existing social order.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the dilemma was expediency. The early church needed both missionaries and martyrs and was quick to glorify the work of women in these situations. But social tension was apparent. In the "Acts of Thecla," for example, Paul appreciates Thecla's work but attempts time and again to restrict her activity, "fearing lest some greater temptation had come upon her."<sup>7</sup> Precisely because of social dictates, women were often effective missionaries in their roles as wives and mothers, converting their non-Christian husbands or raising their children as Christians whether or not their spouse might approve. Indeed, this kind of behind-the-scenes evangelism helped Christianity to succeed.<sup>8</sup>

The early Christian ideal of celibacy also held important implications for women. In practical terms it physically freed them from the bearing and raising of children and allowed women the possibility of travel for the church, as missionaries or pilgrims, and of work for the church community of their own locale. At the same time, virginity bestowed considerable honor on its adherents; here too women benefited from an increase in status.

The earliest Christian communities developed defined positions for women, first as widows and virgins, and later as *canonicae* and nuns. These positions granted women a recognized status in the larger church structure but also substantially restricted their range of activity.<sup>9</sup> As the church began to settle into place during the fourth century, women with social power—the wealthy patronesses of Rome, or the empresses—could sometimes follow their own decisions, but most women found themselves in seriously limited circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

The particular experience of women in the Syrian Orient both reflects and illuminates the larger picture. The ancient Near East evidences religious traditions remarkable for their receptivity toward feminine aspects of the divine, thus differing greatly from the classical realm.<sup>11</sup> From its polytheistic past came the heritage of the Syrian Goddess, in the

forms of Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Astarte, and the Aramaic Atargatis. The cult of the Syrian Goddess was pervasive across the Mediterranean cities, enduring through Hellenistic and Roman times and into the early Christian Era. In the pagan cosmology of the Syrian Orient, she functioned as part of a triad, a "holy trinity," of Mother, Father, and Son; such a configuration frequently characterized religious beliefs of the ancient Near East. Her worshippers recognized her as a universal divine presence, identifying her with Isis, the Phrygian Cybele, and Greek Hera, as the Great Mother of creation.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the Syrian Orient was primarily Christianized through Judaism.<sup>13</sup> Judaism offered a practical heritage in which women often played an important role in the salvation history of the Israelites, despite the cultic restrictions imposed on them.<sup>14</sup> Here too the aggressively masculine imagery of the God of Israel constituted a consciously contrived imagery, working in reaction against neighboring religious concepts and deities. An undercurrent of female imagery is also found in the Old Testament: God as midwife (Ps. 22:9–10), God as comforting mother (Isa. 49:15, 66:13), and God travailing in the throes of divine labor pains (Isa. 42:14b).<sup>15</sup>

The complementary strains of thought fostered within Jewish monotheism are striking. Most notable is the female personification of Holy Wisdom—*Hokhma*, "Wisdom," is a feminine noun in Hebrew—as she who sits at the Lord's right hand, the force through whom God creates and acts. When the prevalence of Gnosticism threatened mainstream Wisdom speculation, there followed a rabbinical development of another female image, that of the holy *Shekinah*—also a feminine noun in Hebrew—the female personification of God's divine presence, she who is His daughter and His bride.<sup>16</sup>

Neither Wisdom nor the Syrian Goddess represented the dominant theological focus of their respective religions. Yet both, and in particular the Goddess, were more powerful than comparable female deities of the Greek or Roman pantheons.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that early Syriac Christianity developed a tradition of feminine symbols for aspects of the divine. Syriac tradition at its earliest, and for centuries thereafter, saw the Holy Spirit as female, following both the instinct of grammar (*ruhā* is a feminine noun in Syriac) and the inherited pattern of a divine triad.<sup>18</sup> The second-century *Odes of Solomon* offer profound feminine imagery. Not only is the Holy Spirit portrayed in the feminine, as the Mother Spirit, but so too at times is Christ clothed in feminine images and terms; and the striking Ode 19 hymns God in female form.<sup>19</sup>

Ode 19 points to a further contribution in the Syrian appreciation for

the feminine. In this ode, the Virgin Mary is hailed as the "Mother with many Mercies," who "bore . . . without pain"; she who "loved with redemption," "guarded with kindness," and "declared with grandeur."<sup>20</sup> The confidence of this passage exceeds the reserved picture of Marian devotion in the second century that we draw from more Western sources, and it appears somewhat precocious: the themes touched upon prefigure major Marian doctrinal developments, rarely pursued before the fifth century elsewhere, and some not until the tenth century.<sup>21</sup>

There is a spiritual kinship bridging Ode 19 to the highly developed Marian hymns of Ephrem Syrus in the fourth century.<sup>22</sup> Although Ephrem marks the artistic and theological flowering of Syrian veneration for Mary, without this background he could not have introduced Marian devotion in so mature a form to the Syrian Orient. This kindred sense may add weight to the theory that the *Protevangelion of James*, the influential second-century apocryphal account of the Virgin, is of Syrian origin.<sup>23</sup> The Syrian version of the *Protevangelion* is our oldest translation of the work, and its immediate and long-lasting popularity in the Syrian Orient is well attested. An independent but related Syriac *Life of the Virgin* was also in circulation, again probably as early as the mid-second century.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, Mary's place in early Syriac Christianity contrasts with that of the Western church until the rise of mainstream Marian devotion during the fifth century.<sup>25</sup>

Again, not unconnected is the emphasis in early Syriac tradition on birth imagery in relation to baptism.<sup>26</sup> The imagery popular in the Greco-Latin churches was that of resurrection, of baptism as a "dying and rising," and the baptismal water as a "grave," following on the Pauline teachings of Rom. 6:4–6 especially. In early Syriac tradition, baptism was above all a rebirth, following John 3:3–7, and the baptismal water was the womb that bore true sons and daughters for the Heavenly Kingdom. Baptism became the "Mother of Christianity," as Mary had been the Mother of Christ. Womb imagery embellished Syriac theology further: Syriac writers saw the three major events of Christ's life—the Nativity, Baptism in the Jordan, and the Descent to Hell—as three "wombs." And birth imagery revealed the progression of cosmic order: the virgin earth "gave birth" to humanity, Mary to Christ, and Christ to Christians through the womb of the baptismal waters.<sup>27</sup> The image of baptism as a new birth, from the womb of the font, continues to this day in the liturgies of the various Syriac churches.<sup>28</sup>

Religious experience in the Syrian Orient had thus long resonated with an understanding of the divine that deeply embraced feminine aspects, both in its imagery and in its symbols. This experience was not

easily shared with Greco-Latin culture, despite its fervent reception in Hellenistic times of the oriental goddess cults. These cults had remained external borrowings even when "Hellenized" or "Romanized" and, as such, were in fundamental tension with the adopting society.<sup>29</sup> They point to what was lacking in classical spirituality, rather than to what was inherent in it. Thus, for example, the Western church banned the *Protevangelion* as a heretical work almost as soon as it was published; again, female imagery on a par with the *Odes of Solomon* would not appear in the West until medieval times. So it was not unexpected that Syriac Christianity should eventually find its "wings clipped," under pressure to conform to the mainstream Greco-Latin churches.

By the year 400, Syriac writers were presenting the concept of the Holy Spirit in closer conformity with that of the "orthodox" church. This involved a dramatic change on their part. When used to signify the third element of the Trinity, *ruhā* ("Spirit") was treated grammatically as a masculine noun, although the word itself remained unaltered. The change governed only that particular usage of the word. After 400, Syriac writers no longer followed the tradition found uniformly in earlier works but referred to the Spirit in masculine terms and imagery (although an occasional hymn writer followed the older practice, apparently for metrical reasons).

In similar manner, the otherwise feminine *melthā*, "Word," became masculine when used to translate the Greek *logos*, as found in the Peshitta. The case of *melthā* is not necessarily as provocative as that of *ruhā*, where a clear theological concern prompted the change: the Holy Spirit was not female and that was that. The transformation of *melthā*, on the other hand, may reflect the translation techniques of the time, whereby such an alteration could happen simply in the attempt to render important terminology from one language to another more faithfully. We do not have cases in the early Syriac Fathers of a female imagery for the Word as we do for the Spirit. But the indisputable motivation with regard to the Spirit would suggest that the parallel experience of the Word is too close for coincidence.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, it has been suggested that devotion to the Virgin flowered in concert with the decline of the Spirit as a "motherly" presence.<sup>31</sup> But Syrian veneration for Mary is clearly well established long before the fifth century, and the two feminine objects of reverence co-existed easily, for example, in the hymns of Ephrem.<sup>32</sup>

Spirituality can permeate various aspects of a culture, but the question here is whether or not the feminine symbolism of the Syrian churches brought any practical results for the Christian community.

As was generally the case for the Roman Empire as a whole, Syrian society before its Christianization provided women with a relative degree of freedom and respect, at least for those of the upper class, resulting from the advantages of an affluent society.<sup>33</sup> Again, as was the general experience of the Greco-Roman world, the basic Christian precepts of equal worth and responsibility for the sexes were received by this society with some ambivalence. There was, however, an important difference in nuance: the Syrian Orient received these teachings in a religious context that instinctively comprehended them, harboring an inherent sense of feminine presence in the experience and perception of the divine. That this was indeed a matter of nuance rather than precept must be stressed. Nonetheless, religious and societal concepts gave substance to one another when they coincided; to this extent, the society of the Syrian Orient would have been more vulnerable to the consequences of the Christian injunctions toward equality than the less sensitive societies in which classical presuppositions held sway. A greater strain on familiar Syrian social structures would perhaps have resulted. The changes in the religious culture, from earliest Syriac Christianity in the second century to that established as "orthodox" in the fourth and fifth centuries, charts the development from a Christian society that initially granted women new choices to one that seriously curtailed their place.

Marcionism was probably the most pervasive form of early Christianity in the Syrian Orient.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, it offered an understanding of the Gospel message that was essentially egalitarian. Its practitioners lived and worshiped according to a literal interpretation of the Pauline injunction that in Christ there is neither male nor female. Its women were granted the exceptional rights to teach, exorcise, and baptize. The practical consequences of Marcion's preachings against marriage meant that women were not restricted to producing children and serving a family; they had more freedom of activity.<sup>35</sup> The Marcionites offered women leadership roles important for the social rendering of their religion, as much as for its theology. In the Syrian Orient, these ideas would fall on especially fertile soil, as an extension into the temporal realm of religious concepts already deeply rooted.<sup>36</sup>

Asceticism also flavored the overall development of Christianity in the Syrian Orient, heretical or orthodox, for many centuries. Much as Marcionism had done, the general glorification of celibacy as part of popular Syrian Christianity raised new prospects for women.<sup>37</sup> As widows or virgins, in spiritual marriage or through the office of the Daughters of the Covenant, the *bnath qyāmā*, women held a venerated place within the social community. These practices continued to be popular

forms of Christian life even after the rise of the monastic movement offered a further option, separation from the lay society. Nor did the limitations of existing social patterns restrict women's spiritual ambitions: convents became common, but women, too, undertook the rigors of the anchoritic life and even stylitism.<sup>38</sup>

But the overall situation was double-edged, and it was ultimately the negative image of women that prevailed. By the late third century, pressure to conform to the Greco-Latin churches was growing. A major target was the curtailment of ascetic activities in lay society. Spiritual marriage, in particular, was attacked, a battle that proved difficult for the mainstream authorities.

By the fifth century in the Syrian Orient feminine imagery of the divine was eliminated, leaving only the Virgin Mary as an exalted feminine symbol. During the fifth century women's place in Syrian Christian society became rigidly restricted. By that time, even ascetic women were viewed as a source of danger to men. Monks took vows never to speak with a woman or to lay eyes on one; it was canonically forbidden for monks to eat with any woman, including their mothers. Monks without beards were despised for resembling women, yet self-castration maintained its popularity in some circles. Nuns were treated as simply less bothersome and easier to control than ordinary women: a greater stress was laid on cenobitic communities for them, rather than eremitic pursuits, and it was felt that they should have a "master" (*rabā*) placed over them. Furthermore, it was widely held that nuns should not see the priest during the communion service; thus, abbesses were also deaconesses, able to distribute the Eucharist themselves, a practice that was not shared by their Greek or Latin counterparts and that lasted into the sixth century.<sup>39</sup>

Despite ample testimony in writings from the Syrian Orient that women exercised spiritual leadership, writers rarely acknowledged that women had this capacity. The Syrian church did not encourage autonomy for women. Theodoret's *Historia religiosa* pays little attention to women, and those few he does see fit to mention are confined to the last two chapters.<sup>40</sup> His women subjects practiced a penitential asceticism: they were veiled from head to toe; their eyes were ever downcast; they never spoke; they were enclosed; they wore iron chains; they wept continually; they were supervised by men. These women fit an acceptable social pattern, despite the physical strength and the very real suffering their practices involved. For their manner, paradoxically, fit mainstream views on the social position of women. Unlike the aggressive and exhibitionist asceticism of their male comrades in the *Historia religiosa*, Theodoret presents us with women who labor at a passive, inward practice.<sup>41</sup>



Two women saints important to Syriac tradition illustrate where the boundaries lay at the turn of the sixth century, the time when their hagiographies were probably written, and roughly the time that John of Ephesus was born. The first is Saint Febronia, martyred by Roman officials around the year 300.<sup>42</sup> Whether of legendary or historical character (and we can assume a small kernel of truth, around which the *Life* was built), the *Life of Febronia* is an extraordinary text.<sup>43</sup> It tells the story of a woman raised from birth in a convent near Nisibis, especially renowned for her ascetic discipline and her capacity to teach. But the mark of her sanctity lay in the fact that Febronia had never seen a man or been seen by one. The arrival of Roman soldiers, however, led to her imprisonment and death by slow torture, much of it sexual, as a warning to other Christians in the area.

A primary aspect of Febronia's *Life* lies in the tension between Christian purity (symbolized by Febronia's physical and social virginity), and pagan lust (in the form of the Romans' alternative offer that she could live if she would marry one of their officials). The sexual torture displays this symbolism sharply. So great is Febronia's purity that the use of her body as a sexual object does not convey sin, as women's sexuality was commonly seen to do. Rather, in this martyrdom it was specifically her body in its sexual identification that brought her salvation—and the early church always understood a martyr's death to bear upon the salvation of all believers. Thus, in this text, we have a rarely heard sentiment in early Christian writings when Febronia declares that she is not ashamed of her naked body.<sup>44</sup> In fitting homage, this text claims to have been written by a woman—an event remarkable in itself in antiquity—Thomaïs, a nun of Febronia's convent who later became its abbess. Literarily, the female authorship underscores the story's central theme of purity and defilement, but it also results in an unusual characterization of women. In this text, great emphasis is placed on women's friendships with other women. Moreover, the women in the story are depicted as well educated, intellectually sophisticated, and courageous in the largest sense. The common hagiographical practice, Syrian or otherwise, is to present women saints as individuals who are exceptions to the rule of their kind; convents are generally treated as groups of women and thus derided for harboring institutionally the worst traits of their constituents. By contrast, Febronia is presented as a special woman among many fine women.

An altogether different view of women and their sexuality is presented in the story of Pelagia, Antioch's notorious courtesan. Converted suddenly and in spectacular manner, she then disappeared and secretly lived out her life in Jerusalem in the guise of a eunuch hermit. Pelagia

thus left behind not only her former life but also her former self: her former gender. Her real identity was discovered at her death.<sup>45</sup> Pelagia's tale was captivating and, unlike Febronia's story, inspired numerous other saints' lives along the same line. The transvestite saint was a hagiographical motif that flourished across the Christian Roman Empire between the fifth and ninth centuries, having started in the Syrian milieu. The transvestite saints were women who chose to pursue their Christian vocations disguised as monks, and whose sanctity hence derived from living literally as men.<sup>46</sup> Their ruse was inevitably discovered, at their death if not before, and always accompanied by exclamations of praise and wonder: here, truly, were women who had risen to glory.

The roots of this theme date back to the apocryphal "Acts of Thecla," in which Thecla had begged Paul's permission to dress as a man for her missionary efforts, much to his distress.<sup>47</sup> But the starting point for popular literature was Pelagia's story. The related variations on the transvestite motif were often blatantly allegorical: these women chose to disguise themselves as men, to "become" men, because they could not serve God adequately as women. Nor was this theme found only in legend; real women followed Pelagia's example.<sup>48</sup> Although the motif was of questionable orthodoxy—Deut. 22:5 expressly forbids either sex to assume the dress of the other, and church fathers debated this matter with reference to Thecla, at least<sup>49</sup>—the extremity of the Syrian method here clearly tapped an incisive and widespread sentiment; the image crystallized the misogyny that had become an integral part of Syrian Christianity, as of the larger church.<sup>50</sup>

The tendencies and concepts underlying the development of Christianity in the Syrian Orient are consonant with those displayed throughout the Greco-Roman world. What marks the Syrian Orient as peculiar in relation to the wider church are the extremes to which it played out ideas common to the whole, whether in religious behavior or in religious literature. Consequently, although the larger Christian body might decry the excesses of Syrian practices, often, as with the popular practice of celibacy, the mainstream church exhibited a similar predilection; or, as with stylitism, it adapted the practice to its own circumstances. So too the literal enactment of images and symbols in the Syrian Orient, as in the case of the transvestite saint, reflected the wider consensus, but with a more specific articulation.

Such, then, was the tradition inherited by the women in John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, and it is against this heritage that their cases must be considered. In some instances, John contributes directly to the societal edifice the broader church was then constructing for

women. To that extent, he reveals a Syrian Christian society that has aligned itself, or considers itself aligned, with a wider church body. The various directions that had been fostered by earlier Christianity had settled into the marked confines of an institution imposed over the whole of the Christian community, however diverse its members.

But John shows something akin to a naive innocence in his response to the holy women he meets as individuals. He seems unaware of the conflict between his language and their actions, between what he says about them and what he tells us they actually do. Ever mindful of the afflictions suffered in the Byzantine East, he is keen to offer his female saints as proof of the strength with which the church could handle times of crisis. Hence he delights in presenting these women as empowered by and responsive to the Christian message. But he also preserves a safety valve, by looking at their activities as part of the "emergency" operations of the Monophysites. John's women indeed reveal many of his ideals, but his manner of presentation at times, as we shall see, reflects contrary social values.

## JOHN'S *LIVES*: SIXTH-CENTURY PATTERNS

John's treatment of women in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* was typical of his day. He devotes only a few of his chapters to female rather than male ascetics; and although he mentions numerous cases of deeply religious laywomen, he brushes over these without detailing them. Elsewhere in his *Lives*, womankind appears in her more familiar guise: weak, feeble minded, and sister to Eve.

Women in general fall outside the scope of John's collection. But he does provide us with occasional glimpses of women's experiences, and these are not without insight: the grief of the barren women who seek help from his holy men and the equally desperate joy when a child is born to them.<sup>51</sup> John veers in these instances between the specific and the universal: motherhood in marriage was the only socially acceptable occupation by which a woman could justify her existence, apart from asceticism. But the social stigma of barrenness was a paradoxical one. In the ascetically minded view of John's day, the blessing of children was a dubious gift, if not futile. Celibacy was the higher achievement. Motherhood might be necessary, but it brought women only grudging praise. The connection John misses is that between these childless women with their frightened prayers and the extraordinary number of possessed women who turn to his holy men for exorcism. Instead, he simply takes

for granted, without seeking a cause, that women and girls are the ones most susceptible to demonic madness.<sup>52</sup> Childbearing and insanity are the two main reasons John presents for women's recourse to holy intercession; these are the contexts in which they are seen.

John does not portray women as intrinsically evil, corruptive, or destructive. But as if to echo Tertullian's sentiments, John presents women as passive, even unwitting, instruments of Satan's wiles: they are literally the devil's gateway, the path by which evil can most effectively cause the downfall of holy men. The blessed Tribunus was sorely endangered when a landlady attacked him "with all the lasciviousness and violence of impurity and adultery." His victory in the situation gave proof of his spiritual fortitude.<sup>53</sup> Not without reason did the stylite Maro forbid women to enter the enclosure of his column, demanding instead that they shout to him from beyond the enclosure wall if they desired counsel.<sup>54</sup>

John highlights the ambiguity found in the views of the wider church. He is quick to honor women of virtue, but these are presented as particular individuals for him; women in general are ready tools for the Adversary. He sets the two views side by side and yet misses the irony of doing so. Thus he dedicates an entire chapter of his *Lives* to the "believing queen" Theodora.<sup>55</sup> Here and in other chapters, John praises Theodora for her aid to the Constantinopolitan refugees,<sup>56</sup> her perseverance in seeking counsel from holy men, and her piety. Laywoman and empress, with a Chalcedonian husband and the obvious disadvantages of her past, Theodora is yet presented by John as a model Christian. And when later, after her death, the Chalcedonians tried to desecrate her good works, it is no coincidence that they chose to do so by polluting the palace of Hormisdas, sending into it "some women with their husbands, and others who were not chaste, and filled the place where the blessed men lived, where the sacrament and service of God used to be performed."<sup>57</sup> A sudden fire turned the tables, "purifying" the holy place and killing some of the women. John does not hesitate to call this divine justice.

Such incidents in John's *Lives* are relatively few when compared, for example, with John Moschus' *Pratum spirituale*. Nonetheless, in his most bizarre account of temptation by the devil, John plainly states that seeing the image of the Blessed Virgin in any woman is folly. John's story of two monks who encounter Satan in the guise of Mary's image is an unusual one,<sup>58</sup> and not least because he so rarely discusses fallen monks or nuns.

Jacob and his spiritual brother, the same two monks who had been forced to establish a sanctuary for exorcism, roused the jealousy of the Evil One, who then contrived an ingenious downfall for them.<sup>59</sup> One

night from among the crowds of possessed persons who slept in the sanctuary awaiting a cure, Satan chose a young woman "of worldly appearance."

Her accordingly the demons took, and they clothed her in awe-striking forms of phantasmal rays; and they led her up and seated her on the bishops' throne. . . . Then they filled the whole martyr's chapel again with phantasmal forms, as if forsooth they were angels of God.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, some of the demons entered where the holy men were sleeping. "Emitting rays with the appearance of light," they roused the two monks and exhorted them to make haste for the chapel, explaining, "the holy Mary the God-bearer has been sent to you, with a great host of angels." Seizing some incense they flew to the chapel, where they found demons in the likeness of "angels of brilliant light," and the woman enthroned with "a semblance of light flashing from her." Fear and awe stole their wits, and commanded by the demons the monks prostrated themselves in obeisance before the unholy sight. Worse sacrilege, however, was yet to come. The young woman proclaimed her identity as Mary the Mother of God, claiming that Christ had sent her to ordain them presbyters. The two monks thought this vision had come to them as an act of special grace, and they knelt before her as she performed the ordinations.<sup>61</sup>

At once, the demons filled the air with laughter; and the phantasmal vision faded, revealing not the Blessed Virgin but a simple Greek girl seated on the bishops' throne. Jacob and his brother were mortified. They fled to John of Tella, who heard their confession (with suitable astonishment) and laid three years penance on them. Thenceforth the two monks "led even more severe lives than before, with sorrow and tears," until at last they were absolved of their guilt in the strange affair.<sup>62</sup>

John has no blame for the woman herself. She is already possessed by demons before the episode takes place; she is "unaware even herself" of what is happening; and she is not responsible for what is said, since "the fiend spoke in her."<sup>63</sup> She is a mute puppet, instrument for but not party to the wiles of Satan. The arresting point, however, is that these monks do not fall into sexual sin, as so often happens in hagiography; they sin theologically, an altogether different theme of women as the source of evil. That the Virgin Mary should command her own worship, as if she were not exalted but divine; that she should further dare to consecrate men to the priesthood, an authority granted to no woman, not even herself (as Epiphanius of Salamis and others enjoyed recalling): such ideas could only be the work of the devil.

John's account of the feigned image of Mary is his most lurid state-

ment regarding the potential dangers of women. Fittingly, it pinpoints the church's paradoxical attitude towards women. For the guilty woman here is very much a sister to the crowds of women John leaves undifferentiated elsewhere. She is nameless; she comes to the holy men because she is possessed; she is a source of evil to these monks through no fault of her own, no will of her own, and no knowledge of her own.

In his portrayal of women as instruments of Satan, John did occasionally, as in the case of Tribunus' would-be landlady, evoke woman in the image of Eve. Yet, what John tells us of women's actual involvement in the Christian community more often directly contradicts this portrayal. Thus we learn from John's *Lives*, apart from the chapters about holy women, that women in all ranks of society were involved in the religious affairs of the community. In the cases of Peter<sup>64</sup> and the traders Elijah and Theodore,<sup>65</sup> pious sisters living private religious lives brought them to their conversions. From "young girls" to "old women," John's cities and towns did not lack in good works by Christian women. Indeed, as if not seeing his own contradictions, John writes about pious wives who are crucial for the holy work of their husbands. At times, it is women specifically in their roles as wives and mothers who surpass all others in the quality of their religious practices.<sup>66</sup> One such woman was Maria, wife of Thomas the Armenian.<sup>67</sup> John tells us little about her other than to mention her work setting up a convent in tandem with Thomas' monastery, to which she brought her daughter and the other women of the household as companions in the monastic life.

Maria is named by John; otherwise the women in these brief citations are not. He mentions them in passing in the course of his accounts of their brothers or their husbands or their sons. Their individual identities are not important to him, although he clearly affirms their importance to the life of the church community. Further, unlike the few he presents in the image of Eve, John tells us that these devout women act by their own choice. They know their vocations and they carry them out.

John's account, then, of Satan at work through the image of Mary is not so outlandish as it might appear. In a work such as the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, a work whose basis lies in experience rather than in stereotype or didacticism, the use of Mary's image rather than Eve's for admonitory purposes is surprisingly appropriate. John's encounters would suggest that if women represented a threat to the Christian community of his times, they did so under Mary's aegis, by their capacity for worthiness, and not through the inheritance of Eve. By their competence and fortitude, women themselves belied the church's stance against them.

## JOHN'S HOLY WOMEN: WOMEN OF SPIRIT

John feels compelled to justify his inclusion of holy women<sup>68</sup> by citing the apostolic injunction that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). He further insisted that the lives of these women in no way detracted from, or fell short of, the standard set by his other subjects.<sup>69</sup> Of the holy woman Susan he says, "Not only is the mighty strength of Christ God apt to show its activity in men who are powerful in appearance and mighty and forceful, but also in weak, feeble, frail women."<sup>70</sup> The highest praise he could offer the anchorite Mary was to honor her as "a woman who by nature only bore the form of females but in herself also bore the character and soul and will not only of ordinary men, but of mighty and valiant men."<sup>71</sup> The frequency of such statements in hagiography pertaining to women indicates that John writes formulaically in this respect.<sup>72</sup> But the significance was not lost in the formula; for where John expresses the common sentiments of his church and society, he tells us, too, something of the actual conditions of women's lives.

Yet despite this, John's holy women emerge from his text in their own right. Their decisions and courses of action suggest a sense of self-determination not generally found in ascetic women as it was in men—such autonomy being even rarer for laywomen—but to some extent made possible through the fluid and often chaotic sixth-century Monophysite struggle. These are women who chose to define themselves not in relation to father, husband, or child but only in relation to God; sometimes they acted autonomously rather than through a convent. But it is important to remember their cultural context: these women were not acting out of a sense of self (as we might see it). They acted because they believed God had called them to this action. Their sense of self was altogether absent; indeed, in their minds, irrelevant. In each case, public reaction to them was the standard applied to any holy man. Whatever inhibitions the church may have had, ordinary people seem to have measured sanctity by effective action rather than by gender.

John selects only a handful of women for special attention. Culturally, they cross the spectrum of social strata that characterizes the sixth-century Byzantine Empire; ascetically, they represent a diversity of experience. Taken as individuals, these women fit well into John of Ephesus' overall schema: his vision of the Monophysite cause as lived out through an interlocking relationship of asceticism and society. But seen as a group—and, as we may gather from the references treated above, as part of a much larger community of women within the Mono-

physite body—they provide us with significant insight, both toward John himself (and thus the leadership he offered the Monophysite movement) and toward the ideals he sought to nurture.

These women are seen in the *Lives* as playing roles critical to the needs of the stricken Monophysite cause; further, they are seen to provide encouraging and inspiring leadership to the Monophysite community. Although none of them sought this status, it emerged as a consequence of their own religious commitment.

John begins with Mary the Pilgrim, who, like her namesake, chose the “better way” of life devoted to faith rather than to works in the world.<sup>73</sup> An ascetic from childhood, Mary eventually decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There she spent three years on Golgotha, practicing a severe asceticism and passing much time in ecstatic trances. Those who saw her reckoned her a feeble-minded beggar, mad or senile. Mary herself cherished her anonymity: nothing and no one distracted her from her chosen course.

But it happened that some men came who knew her, and seeing her in prayer they made obeisance to her. Mary was “greatly upset” because she did not want people to know about her labor, but the men had soon told her story throughout the community.

Then those in whose eyes she had been reckoned a foolish old woman—one who sat there because of charity, so that she might sustain her body’s needs—now began to honour her as a great and holy woman, begging her to pray for them.<sup>74</sup>

But Mary did not want to be a holy woman, “lest she lose the fruits of her ascetic labour.” She fled, “deeply saddened.”<sup>75</sup> Making her abode in Tella, Mary made a vow to return to Jerusalem each year to pray in the sacred places. This she fulfilled, traveling always in the hottest season; at the same time, she continued to shun worldly affairs while making her annual pilgrimages. Yet, John tells us, so holy was this woman that “many powerful miracles were worked by her presence, and not by her will or her word.”<sup>76</sup>

In some respects, Mary, having chosen a form of asceticism taken up most often by men and only rarely by women (at least as far as we know), reminds us of the early Syrian anchorites. Moreover, not only did she choose to reject the standard course taken by women who desired the religious life—the convent community—but she further refused to be bound by the institutionalized aspects that overtook so many male ascetics over time. Her strength of character in this regard contrasts with the timidity of Maro the Stylite, unhappily and unwillingly drawn into the worldly responsibilities attending his profession.<sup>77</sup> The occur-



rence of miracles wrought simply by Mary's presence was but an affirmation of the authority gained by such a life-style, and, in John's view, ultimately its validation. Mary may have separated herself from the world, but the power of her sanctity remained at work within it.

John's enthusiasm, however, is even greater for Mary's younger sister Euphemia, although Euphemia was, in worldly terms, a more obvious threat to the existing social and religious order.<sup>78</sup> Euphemia's remarkable career and the leadership and service she gave to the city of Amida in its time of need have already been discussed in chapter 3. What concerns us here are the particular traits that characterized Euphemia's asceticism and ministry.

Unlike her pilgrim sister, Euphemia had married but was widowed shortly thereafter and left with one child, a daughter Maria. Watching the work of her sister, Euphemia turned to the religious life with Maria, regulating their life together according to a rigid devotional plan. Euphemia also educated her daughter in psalmody, Scripture, and writing. "But while observing her sister Mary's abstinence and other practices, at the same time Euphemia was fulfilling another sublime and exalted role, since she served two orders together—asceticism and relief for the afflicted."<sup>79</sup>

Euphemia's distinct way of life was soon known throughout the city of Amida. Rejecting even her role as mother, she drew her daughter into the same service as sister rather than child, and Maria wove yarn that Euphemia sold in order to supply a meager fare for themselves, as well as to purchase the necessities to care for the sick and destitute. Such disregard for social convention unsettled Amida's more conservative inhabitants, who admonished Maria about her "working mother."<sup>80</sup> Others sought to support these activities with donations and urged Euphemia to accept food for herself and Maria. The holy woman, however, would not have it.

God forbid that I should . . . satisfy my body from the toils of others while it has strength to work, or receive the stains of their sins upon my soul! . . . Do you want to soil me with the mud of your sins? I am blemished enough as I am.<sup>81</sup>

But with the onslaught of the Monophysite persecutions, and the exile of the Amidan monasteries, Euphemia found herself laboring further to care for refugees and other victims. Unable to support such ministry by the earnings of her own and her daughter's handiwork, she was forced to take greater contributions from others. Nonetheless, she would not allow those of the city who were well off, and thus able to give her aid, to feel that they were benefiting their own souls through her charity.

For as it is written that the righteous shall be as confident as a lion, so this woman confidently upbraided everyone regardless of their rank until the noblemen and women of the city were full of trepidation because of her. When she entered their thresholds and they heard that Euphemia was coming, they would say, "Alas for us, [Euphemia] has come to give us a good thrashing!" Then she would boldly take whatever she wanted to give to whoever was in need. . . . And so she passed judgment on them until those of the secular life were somewhat peeved with her.<sup>82</sup>

Many urged a less strenuous life upon Euphemia, to her consternation: John himself would jokingly plead with her, "Don't kill yourself so violently!"<sup>83</sup> But Euphemia's life fulfilled John's own ascetic ideals, especially her pragmatic change in ministry once the persecutions began. While acclaiming the contemplative life practiced by those such as her sister Mary, he clearly empathized with those who, akin to Euphemia, sought God amidst suffering. John juxtaposed the two ways of perfection as complementary to one another and so suggested that together these women rendered perfect worship to the divine. "So the report of these two sisters was told throughout the east, and wonder seized everyone that each of them in a way of life without equal bravely exerted herself, acquiring righteousness."<sup>84</sup>

Euphemia's activities were more gregarious than those of her sister, but her determination to define her life through her relationship with God was similar in impact. In refusing to allow others to control or even influence her ministry, even when they contributed goods to it—refusing, as she said, to take their sins upon herself—Euphemia like her sister appeared indifferent to social mores, not simply in terms of what was acceptable for women but also in terms of what were the established patterns for asceticism. Theirs was an activity perhaps more possible under conditions of cultural instability and religious anxiety, the confines of sixth-century society in the Byzantine East.

John's account of the holy woman Susan has also been treated elsewhere in the present work.<sup>85</sup> As he portrays her, she seems a less abrasive figure than Mary or Euphemia. Also an ascetic since childhood, Susan chose exile in Egypt with a handful of her sisters rather than oppression at the hands of Chalcedonian authorities; further, although she desired the solitary life and accordingly labored as a hermit in the inner desert of Mendis, she was persuaded to remain with the "establishment," by the pleas of an uprooted community, and to take on the supervision of an ascetic institution of both women and men. For the Monophysite refugees, Susan was a holy woman adept at healing, exor-

cism, and instruction. Her leadership calmed a distressed people. The conditions of persecution thus demanded from her a role otherwise unthinkable for her.

But there were more factors at work. Susan's life as a holy woman arose out of the course of her ascetic career: her authority was the result of its excellence and single-mindedness. Her inheritance of secular wealth was renounced before she entered her first convent; she did not translate a secular title or a position of influence into the ascetic community.<sup>86</sup> Although she ultimately agreed to follow an institutional role, she did so in an effort to stabilize in some way a community fraught with trauma.

Unlike Mary or Euphemia, Susan expressed a self-consciousness of her limitations as a woman. Although at no point did she allow such thoughts to hinder her actions, she was continually concerned about relations between the monks and the nuns.<sup>87</sup> She impressed John because she kept her head veiled and her glance cast downwards so that no man ever saw her face. He learned that she had taken this vow upon entering the ascetic life, and that through her many years as a nun had not looked upon a man's face, fearing, she said, both the harm her sight could cause men and the harm their sight could cause her.

The men under Susan's guidance supported her leadership. John, too, when he visited her community, came away "in great wonder at her words"; it had, indeed, been her reputation that originally led him to visit the community. But despite his praise for her, John found her position as leader for both the male and the female communities uncomfortable and was himself taken aback when he witnessed her authoritative response to a monk suffering temptation.<sup>88</sup>

But the importance of Susan was that she and her kind were precisely what was needed by the Monophysite body in exile. Like Mary the Pilgrim, she ensured spiritual quality; like Euphemia, she led valiantly. Not surprisingly, John left her community, "praising God" as he went.

Mary the Anchorite represented another example for John.<sup>89</sup> Daughter of a noble family, Mary was brought as a child into contact with a holy man in a neighboring district. The meeting transfixed her. Pondering what she had seen, and also the luxurious life that lay ahead of her, she made a categorical decision: "For what reason do we not become as this holy man? Is not this a human being?"<sup>90</sup> and she turned to the ascetic life at once.

Mary's family sought to stop her. With haste, they began wedding preparations, fearing "lest she run away and go to a monastery, and

[they] lose the [rich] man who was to take her to wife." But Mary left and, entering a convent, took the tonsure and the habit. In John's eyes, the course she then followed was the fulfillment of her calling.

And from that time she took that holy old man as her model in all things. . . . And she also distinguished herself in the conflict of persecution for fifteen years, no longer passing night vigils but vigils lasting even a week, and then days, and then she would taste something. And, when she had walked strongly and heroically in the road of righteousness for thirty years, she finished her course and received the crown earned by her life, and fell asleep in peace.<sup>91</sup>

Mary the Anchorite chose for herself a male model. But having taken it, she made it her own and it gave her the means for freedom. When the persecutions struck, Mary turned upon them the power of her prayer. Like the solitaries John describes in relation to the Amidan ascetic community, particularly during its time of exile,<sup>92</sup> Mary's withdrawal from the temporal world is neither an abandonment of it nor a denial of its needs in the crisis at hand. Rather, her spiritual battle serves to anchor the Monophysite cause in its true context: a holy war.

Mary's initial use of a male model does not involve the negation of herself, or of her being, as it does for those women of the "transvestite saint" motif. The model is a means to an end. John praises Mary, in accordance with the theme of her adopted model, in terms that measure sanctity by degrees of maleness: "she only bore the form of females," she was not simply equal in strength and will to "ordinary men" but to "mighty and valiant men."<sup>93</sup> But John's *Life* makes it clear that Mary does not "become male," as Pelagia's successors did; she is glorified for what she does.

Mary's aversion to marriage was, of course, a common feature in the popular religion of the day.<sup>94</sup> Nor was it women alone who sought freedom from what was often a social straitjacket. John tells us, for example, that the holy man Tribunus, too, had fought off the plans and hopes his wealthy family had held for the marriage he could make.<sup>95</sup> But for the women John portrays, there is more at stake than a cultural embrace of the celibate ideal. The ascetic life offered a real alternative to society's structure. John's holy women proved how independent a woman's life could be despite social constraints. The two Marys, Euphemia, and Susan exercised an enviable degree of choice. The contrast of their lives to those of married women—even when a husband shares his wife's religious orientation—is enhanced by John's final two accounts of women of God.

In choosing to write about Caesaria the Patrician, John took on a daunting task.<sup>96</sup> Famous, influential, and wealthy, Caesaria was a holy woman more effective in some respects than an unmarried woman could have been.<sup>97</sup> In the secular society, she had been recognized, as the Roman matron of earlier times, in the role of wealthy patroness; and in that role, had she remained in it, she would have stood in its distinguished Christian ranks, with the likes of Melania the Elder, her granddaughter Melania the Younger, Paula, Olympias, and others.<sup>98</sup> But Caesaria did not, as these women had, translate a role born from the social-class structure into a "Christianized" society of the same nature. Her encounter with the divine called for a different response.

Caesaria had long wished to leave her husband and devote her life to God, but Severus of Antioch had forbidden her, reminding her that a woman's body was not her own.<sup>99</sup> By the time John of Ephesus met her in Alexandria (previously she had lived in Constantinople), however, she had succeeded in gaining control of her life, whether by her own decision, mutual consent with her husband, or widowhood (as seems most likely) we do not know.<sup>100</sup> In any event, here was a woman "who had been reared in endless luxuries, and had grown accustomed to royal habits, who suddenly came to be cut off from all these things, and subjected herself to asceticism beyond measure."<sup>101</sup> So formidable was the ascetic regime Caesaria had undertaken that John was at once beside himself:

So that having found her living in all this asceticism and hardship, we continued blaming her and advising her to give up high things and embrace moderate things, lest being unable to endure she might either lose her strength or fall into severe illness and be forced from necessity to give it all up.<sup>102</sup>

It was characteristic of John's own inclination to advise a softening of ascetic extremes for the sake of channeling such zeal into the needs of the church community as a whole. In Caesaria's case, however, his motives may not have been so altruistic. He appears to have been uncomfortable with her capacity for rigorous practice. Again, although she begged his instruction in spiritual matters, John found she conversed with him as comrade rather than as pupil: "The blessed woman condescended to make confession and say, 'I have here more than seven hundred volumes in number of all the Fathers, to which my intellect and my attention have been devoted for many years.'"<sup>103</sup>

Caesaria's own commitment had inspired many of those who were part of her "secular" household; and like herself, many of them turned

to a life of religious devotion, for the most part accompanying her as their mistress in faith as well as in society, and practicing asceticism with her in her changing places of residence.<sup>104</sup> But to this woman, such continuation of her worldly role was intolerable; she pleaded with John to assist her in severing herself from this vestige of her former existence, so that she might go in the company of two others alone and live as an anchorite in the desert. John would not agree,

because we saw that these plans were unnecessary, and they were beyond her capacity and strength and condition; and besides many [other] arguments . . . we were afraid lest this ardour and the plans came from the evil one.<sup>105</sup>

John's protest, curiously distrustful of Caesaria's vocation, then brought in another point: his fear that if she were to go off to the desert, the members of her household who had followed her to Egypt would be in "danger of destruction." When Caesaria pointed out that it was exactly this worldly responsibility she longed to leave, John was scandalized. "Know that you are an old and feeble woman, and your nature is not strong enough to hold out against these thoughts of yours and endure and struggle."<sup>106</sup>

Caesaria was "vexed and annoyed" at John's overruling of her decision. But her determination did not wane. Founding a monastery for men and a convent for women, "in grand and admirable style," and having endowed them both generously, she herself withdrew into the convent as a recluse, "performing severe and sublime labours." Further,

she declined the headship of the same monastery, but sent to another monastery, and took thence a certain blessed woman great in her modes of life whose name was Cosmiana, and her she appointed archimandri-  
tess, she herself submitting to her like an insignificant and poor sister. And so she continued to labour till the end of her life, which happened after fifteen years.<sup>107</sup>

Far, then, from being a feeble woman of frail nature as John had called her, Caesaria surmounted her obstacles without abandoning her obligations and without compromising her spiritual integrity. John could allow for this kind of decision by an ascetic such as Susan or Mary the Anchorite, who had renounced wealth and influence before inheriting them; or, for example, by a figure such as Thomas the Armenian, who had translated his worldly position and means into the monastic setup he established. Furthermore, John vehemently opposed Caesaria taking on the spiritual battle for the cause that he praised so highly in recluses such as Mary the Pilgrim or Mary the Anchorite. Caesaria's founding of

the monastic communities assisted the cause and probably, like Susan's community, helped to absorb some of the refugee problems. But she refused to use her religious vocation as a springboard for activities of patronage or political influence, as John seems to have wanted. The Monophysite cause may have needed her for work in the temporal world, but Caesaria would not carry her worldly position into her ascetic life.<sup>108</sup>

Marriage for Caesaria had proved to be her cross to bear. While her husband had been with her, marriage encumbered her spiritual aspirations; afterward, its residue, the people dependent upon her and the demands placed on her as one high in the social structure, inhibited her activities. In similar manner, Caesaria's chamberwoman Sosiana endured restrictions on her religious hopes because of the confinement in marriage. Although her husband, Caesaria's chamberlain, shared her high-minded faith and practice, it was not until his death that Sosiana had the liberty to pursue her vocation as she truly desired.

Sosiana and her husband John had been married by law for thirty years; but theirs was a spiritual marriage in the fullest sense.<sup>109</sup>

Never holding carnal intercourse with one another, but living in devoutness and honour and holiness, occupying themselves in fasting and prayer, and genuflexion and recitation of service and watching by night, while hairmats were laid down for them each apart, and in this way they passed the whole length of the night hours, kneeling and lying on their faces, and weeping in prayer and mighty crying to God, without this becoming known to many.<sup>110</sup>

Her husband's death and Caesaria's withdrawal into the convent freed Sosiana at last to fulfill "the vow she had made to God." Delivering to John of Ephesus the accumulated riches from her household—embroidered silk clothes, tapestried linens, garments encrusted with woven gold thread, precious articles of silver—she ordered that the clothes and linens be cut and sewn into altar cloths and veils, and the goods melted to mold chalices and crosses. These she then gave John for the adornment of the churches he founded in the course of his missionary work in Asia Minor. For herself she kept only a few "cheap, ordinary clothes." John was alarmed by Sosiana's sudden self-imposed poverty, and also by the nagging concern that these goods might better be sold for the poor. But the blessed woman insisted on the importance of her vow "made before God"; and John himself was "frightened by our Lord's expression in the gospel about the fine ointment of great price which the woman poured on his head" (John 12:7–8).<sup>111</sup>

Sosiana, then, enclosed in the confines of marriage and secular occupation, achieved a pure religious life. Nor was her vow an irrespon-

sible one. Just as her ascetic devotion served to adorn the Monophysite body, her material gifts were to adorn the churches.

Mary, Euphemia, Susan, Mary the Anchorite, Caesaria, and Sosiana, these are the women John singles out for honor. They serve his cause well, and they do it by a variety of vocations and paths. Even among John's select gathering of Eastern saints, they are an arresting group. John tells us about them; what, in turn, do they tell us about John?

## JOHN AND WOMEN: IMPLICATIONS OF A VISION

In John's stories of these women, we can see not only the perspective of his presentation and its circumstances, but also its consequent meanings. The contrasts between his treatment of women and those in other works of this same genre of hagiographical collections are marked.<sup>112</sup>

Palladius would apparently urge women to lead separate lives for the good of all rather than by reason of devotion to God. Separated into groups, as convent communities, his female ascetics quarrel constantly and require male supervision; but they are prone to vainglory whether alone or in a cenobitic practice.<sup>113</sup> Those women in Palladius who seem most successful in their ascetic pursuits lived anchoretic, enclosed lives.<sup>114</sup> Palladius is willing to praise an active role only among women of high social standing and wealth, advantages of serious import at a time when asceticism was just becoming established within the sociopolitical structure of the empire.<sup>115</sup> His praise for the dignity of Amma Talis and for the convent she governed appears in his collection as if it were a concession to an unstereotyped reality. It is the exception to his rule.<sup>116</sup> Palladius keeps his readers ever-mindful that women, ascetic or otherwise, are a continuous source of sin.<sup>117</sup>

Theodoret's women ascetics are unobtrusive to the degree that they barely figure in his work, except in affirmation of a passive presence.<sup>118</sup> Enclosed, they intrude neither into the temporal world nor into the workings of the church within the world. Their devotional presence is their only acknowledged role. Theodoret does tell us that holy women deserve higher praise than holy men, since theirs is the feebler gender,<sup>119</sup> yet the brief glimpses he provides reveal that in fact these women underwent grave feats of endurance, both physical and spiritual. One finds here a "chosen type" of holy woman, well tailored to suit the interests of an authoritarian ecclesiastical structure.

The treatment by John Moschus is the most stereotyped of these authors. His women characters, whether ascetics or not, are presented al-



most invariably in relation to the sin of fornication. Sometimes they bring it about through their own intrigues,<sup>120</sup> most of the time, however, they are inadvertent, unwilling objects of lust, who seek to prevent or escape the foul crime.<sup>121</sup> Although Moschus plants the guilt firmly on womankind, it is in fact his male characters who weaken in the face of temptation, or who find themselves tormented beyond endurance by their sinful thoughts. Female victims frequently labor to save the souls of their would-be rapists. At the same time, Moschus laces his tales with adoration for the Virgin Mary, whose place in popular religion is presented as both crucial and mandatory.<sup>122</sup> But this is Mary as champion of orthodoxy and champion of chastity; her ascendancy is violently belligerent. As such, she bears little if any resemblance to her female devotees. This powerful image of Mary is portrayed apparently at the cost of possibilities for ordinary women. These Moschus has reduced to a one-dimensional existence.

The contrasts of these cases to those of John of Ephesus are at once apparent. Even while following established ascetic patterns—as pilgrim, charity worker, recluse, or nun—his women are not stereotypes. Their ascetic modes encapsulate the variety of practices he surveys in his more detailed and numerous reports of holy men.

The dependence of John's pragmatism on the needs created by crisis is at its most obvious in these accounts. The irony in his traditional use of language about women, so contrary to what he tells us his holy women do, serves to highlight the opposition between society's values and institutions, on the one hand, and human capacity, on the other. In accord with the earliest churches, grateful for the witness women offered as missionaries and martyrs, the Monophysites in the sixth century needed women's contributions more than they needed the institutional advantages of excluding women from their structural ranks and of restricting them to a passive presence such as that which Theodoret glorifies. John's treatment of his female subjects clarifies his views on the Monophysite situation more sharply than his treatment of men, if only because the roles and activities of his male subjects are not extraordinary to their place in society or in the church.

Far from writing a simple devotional collection, John presents the ambiguous impact of people during a pivotal era. His own missionary works in Asia Minor (with compromisingly Chalcedonian sponsorship); the *ex officio* ordinations performed by the "Fathers" of the Jacobite church, John of Tella, John of Hephaestopolis, and Jacob Burd'aya; the authoritative activities of his women; all of these had an impact of a kind. Motivated by faith, performed for the sake of the Christian body,

their actions were all subversive to the institutions of the state church as it existed, despite being dedicated to it. In the case of the ordinations, the results were as drastic as the step itself: a "new" church was born. The case of the Monophysite missions in Asia Minor proved ultimately ambivalent, since it was a politically successful endeavor for both sides: for the Monophysites, because of the glory and renown it cast on their leaders and traditions, as shown especially in the accounts of these missions in the later chronicles; and for the Chalcedonians, since the converted areas of Asia Minor apparently functioned as Chalcedonian. The case of women, however, laid bare the contradictions of the Monophysite cause. For, just as the early church had done in its time, the Monophysites drew profitably on the strengths of those such as Euphemia or Susan but did not finally incorporate such strengths into the structural format of their own church. Although John called for extreme steps in response to the events of his time, no call is made to give women major institutionalized positions in the church.

Like John himself, the women he writes about are empowered by their personal inspiration, but they are propelled by their times into an arena greater than they had foreseen or chosen. They fit into John's scheme because they respond to the situations at hand through their relation to God and not from their relation to the ascetic "institution" or church structure. They take the crisis upon themselves as their own. John does not change the values he is advancing for these women; rather, they bring his message to fullness. It is both practical and propagandistic for John to celebrate women for deeds such as those in the *Lives*. However, John's own prejudices—evident in his use of language, and in the vivid manipulation of Satan appearing in the Virgin Mary's image—set limits on his zeal and foreshadow the results. Rules change; but the immediacy of crisis does not necessarily call for change in existing structures.

The *Lives of the Eastern Saints* are the product of John of Ephesus' admiration for his comrades. In them, he reasserts the unique potency of asceticism as a power to be channeled into the world, and thus he affirms the ascetics' place as participants in society. At the same time, sixth-century asceticism existed in relation to a society born of specific factors: the mature self-confidence of the ascetic movement and a consequent responsive fluidity of structure. John's treatment of women ascetics points to just how flexible institutions could be. The institutional partnership of asceticism and ecclesiastical organization was strong enough and stable enough to absorb even such threatening flexibility as the sanctioning of authoritative leadership for women. The sanctioning

was itself a response to crisis. But the situation allowing women certain roles of impact was possible only in a period of grave unrest. It was not to become a permanent pattern. Even during the period of crisis, women's roles, although expanded, were still at the periphery of church activities. They might head communities or dispense charity, but they did not become institutionalized leaders or gain any positions in the church hierarchy.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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For dictionaries, encyclopedias, and collections, full details may be found in the Bibliography.

AER	<i>American Ecclesiastical Review</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AMS	<i>Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum</i>
Anal. Boll.	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>Annales: e.s.c.</i>	<i>Annales: économies, sociétés, et civilisations</i>
BEO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , 3d ed., edited by F. Halkin; and idem, <i>Novum Auctarium BHG</i>
BHO	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis</i> , edited by P. Peeters
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syrii</i> (unless otherwise noted)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
CSL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum</i>
DHGE	<i>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques</i>

DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DR	<i>Downside Review</i>
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i>
ECR	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HE	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JME	<i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
NT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
OLP	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PETSE	<i>Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , edited by J. P. Migne
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
POC	<i>Proche-Orient Chrétien</i>
RBK	<i>Reallexicon zur Byzantinischen Kunst</i>
RE	<i>Paulys Realenzyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
RHE	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
ROC	<i>Revue de l'orient chrétien</i>
SCH	<i>Studies in Church History</i> , edited by D. Baker, G. J. Cuming, S. Mews, et alii
SLNPNF	<i>Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>

SSTS	Studies Supplementary to Sobornost
Sub. Hag.	Subsidia Hagiographica
TU	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
ZK	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>

Note on primary sources: For individual saints' lives not in major collections (e.g., John of Ephesus, *Lives*), see under *Vita* \_\_\_\_\_.

Ephesus, edited and translated by E. W. Brooks; the attribution to John was supported by the plagiarism of certain passages from John's *Lives*, but it also indicates how venerable a historian John was held to be in later tradition, and the marked influence of his particular biographical rendering of Jacob's life even where legend had grown extensively. To this spurious *Vita*, 268–73, editor Brooks appends a short text that concerns the transfer in 622 of Jacob's relics from the Egyptian monastery at Casium where he died, to his former home, the monastery of Fsiltha at Tella.

64. See esp., *Sévère ibn-al-Moqaffa, évêque d'Aschmounain, Réfutation de Sa'id ibn-Batriq (Eutychius)*, (Le Livre des Conciles), ed. and trans. P. Chébli, PO 3 (Paris, 1909), 208ff.; Chronicle of Seert, *Histoire nestorienne*, ed. and trans. A. Scher, 140–42; and *Le Livre de la Lampe des ténèbres par Abû l-Barakât Ibn Kabour*, ed. and trans. L. Villecourt, E. Tisserant, and G. Wiet, PO 20 (Paris, 1929), 733.

65. Jacob's demise is perhaps best summarized in Wigram, *Separation of the Monophysites*.

66. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites*, is indispensable for understanding the structural evolution that took place in the Monophysite movement during the sixth century.

## VI. Some Implications: The Case of Women

1. The critical analysis is Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.

2. Luke 8:1–3, 10:38–42.

3. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; idem, "Word, Spirit, and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities," in McLaughlin and Ruether, *Women of Spirit*, 29–70; C. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, 117–49.

4. 1 Cor. 14:33–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–14; Titus 2:3–5; Eph. 5:22–24.

5. Gal. 3:27–28.

6. Chadwick, *Early Church*, 58–59.

7. "The Acts of Paul," in *New Testament Apocrypha* 2: 322–90 (trans. 352–90), esp. 330–33, and 353–64 (trans. "The Acts of Thecla").

8. Cf., for example, A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. J. Moffat (New York, 1908), book 4, chap. 2. The role of mothers and wives as "missionaries" for the faith continued. Examples are legion; but, for instance, in the fourth century Augustine of Hippo was profoundly influenced by his pious mother Monica overshadowing his religiously unconvinced father. The two brothers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa had the example of their devout mother Emmelia and, even more, their great sister Macrina.

9. For the inception and development of ministry and hierarchy for the ecclesiastical body, see, for example, Kirk, *Apostolic Ministry*; Fliche and Martin, *Histoire de l'église* 1:259–78, 373–86, 2:387–402. What happened to women in

the midst of this process is delineated in Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; idem, "Word, Spirit, and Power" (see n. 3 above); Parvey, (see n. 3 above); and Danielou, "Ministère des femmes."

10. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith*. The developing situation for the Western church is well sketched in the two volumes *Religion and Sexism* and *Women of Spirit* (see n. 3 above). For the development in the eastern provinces of the empire, cf. Patlagean, "Histoire de la femme déguisée"; idem, *Pauvreté économique*, esp. 113–55; Grosdidier de Matons, "Femme dans l'empire byzantine"; Beauchamp, "Situation juridique"; and Buckler, "Women in Byzantine Law."

11. J. C. Engelsman, *The Feminine Dimension of the Divine* (Philadelphia, 1979), sets out the basic issues of this subject.

12. See Lucian, *De dea Syria*, and Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 8.23–31, for ancient views on her cult. For her place in ancient Near Eastern religion and in the Greco-Roman world, see Segal, *Edessa*, 45–61; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, esp. 76–121; Strong and Garstang, *Syrian Goddess*; and Nock, *Conversion*.

13. Segal, *Edessa*; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*.

14. P. Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, 41–88; J. Hauptmann, "Images of Women in the Talmud," in Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, 184–212. But the confines of women's lives were rigidly monitored, and no less in the early Christian era than before. See Neusner, *History of the Mishnaic Law*.

15. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric*.

16. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, esp. 144–76. For a survey of scholarship and discussion of Christianity's inheritance of the Wisdom tradition, see J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London, 1980), 163–212, 324–38. Von Rad does not address the issue of whether Wisdom's female persona is significant in itself. Engelsman, *Feminine Dimension of the Divine*, attempts to treat the issue, but here (as also for Demeter and the Virgin Mary) she mishandles the sources. On the Shekinah, see Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung*.

17. The psychological attraction of a Mother Goddess figure is shown especially in the Greco-Roman world by the adoption of the Isis cult, but similarly of Cybele, the Syrian Goddess, and indeed Diana of the Ephesians. Greek and Roman counterparts did not inspire the same response as these oriental mystery cults. See Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*; and Nock, *Conversion*. The Great Mother of Greek mythology, probably at her strongest in Minoan Crete, was considerably scaled down in power and diffused as a cult once the pantheon of Zeus and Hera emerged. Lucian commented that one would have to combine Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, Nemesis, Rhea, Selena, and the Fates in order to encompass the power of the Syrian Goddess; Lucian, *De dea Syria*, 32.

18. See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 312–20.

19. See especially Odes 8, 19, 28, 35, and 36; and Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 312–20, for discussion of this kind of imagery. For recent assess-



ments of Ode 19, see Lagrand, "How was the Virgin Mary"; and Drijvers, "19th Ode of Solomon." It is not until a considerably later date that Western tradition attempts to explore these possibilities. See McLaughlin, "'Christ my Mother.'"

20. Esp. Ode 19:6–10, in *Odes of Solomon*, ed. and trans. J. H. Charlesworth, 81–84.

21. Graef, *Mary* 1:34–35. Graef's suggestion that Ode 19 confuses Mary with the goddess Isis misses the mark: people knew the differences between them.

22. See Brock, "Mary in Syriac Tradition"; idem, "Mary and the Eucharist"; Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve"; and Graef, *Mary* 1:57–62, 119–29. Compare Graef, *Mary*; and idem, "Theme of the Second Eve," for parallel developments in later Greek and Western traditions.

23. The origin of the *Protevangelion* remains in dispute. For the principal theories, see *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:370–88; Strycker, *Forme la plus ancienne*; and Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*. Strycker argues for an Egyptian author, Smid for a Syrian one. Every, "Protevangelion of James," suggests an origin in Ephesus.

24. The Syriac version of the *Protevangelion* is in *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ed. A. Smith-Lewis, *Studia Sinaitica* 11 (London, 1902). For the Syriac Life of the Virgin, see *History of the Blessed Virgin*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge.

25. Cf. also Brown et al., *Mary in the New Testament*, 241–82, 293–94, for Mary's place in Greco-Latin works of the second century.

26. Above all, see Brock, *Holy Spirit*, esp. 79–88, 129–33; and Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, esp. 101–13.

27. Brock, *Holy Spirit*, 130–32.

28. For examples from the Syrian Orthodox, Church of the East, and Maronite liturgies, see Brock, *Holy Spirit*, 79–88, 129–33; and Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, 101–14.

29. For example, Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*; and Nock, *Conversion*.

30. See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 312–20. For a vivid example of the transformation of *meltha*, see the Gospel of John in the Peshitta. Brock, "Aspects of Translation," 87, sees both instances as a logical consequence of translation technique. Cf. also Brock, "Towards a History," 10.

31. Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve," esp. 373.

32. As Murray himself points out, *ibid.*; but also, for example, this reverence can be seen in the *Odes of Solomon*.

33. Segal, *Edessa*, 38–39.

34. As discussed in the Introduction here. See esp. Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites"; Brown, *Body and Society*, 83–102; Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*; and Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1, for the impact of Marcionism on the Syrian Orient.

35. For example, Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.29. Cf. Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 215–16.

36. Marcion himself came from Asia Minor—Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.1, says from the Pontus—but he made his career in Rome. The particular fertility of the Syrian Orient for his teachings, however, finds an important parallel in the “Phrygian heresy” of Montanism. Both groups granted women positions of high responsibility and sacerdotal import; both Phrygia and the Syrian Orient had worshiped goddesses of magnificent character. A natural extension, in both cases, from religious thought to societal consequences may have unconsciously been at work. Certainly these two heresies were the source of particular bitterness for the mainstream church, and their similar settings are striking. Eusebius, *HE* 5.14–19, describes the Montanists as spreading “like venomous reptiles.” It is interesting to speculate here on the consequences of following a historical tradition written by and about men: contemporary sources tell us that some members of the Montanist sect chose to call themselves Priscillianists after their female foundress Prisca (Priscilla). For the scandalized reaction to heresies that granted authoritative roles to women, see, for example, Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.

37. See the earlier discussion in the Introduction here. Cf. Brown, *Body and Society*, 259–84.

38. In general, see Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*. We have little evidence for women stylites beyond the mere records of their existence: Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 2:273–74; Delehayé, “Femmes stylites.” Fiey, “Cénobitisme féminin ancien,” deals mainly with Iraq and reads the lack of evidence more pessimistically.

39. See esp. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*; and Syriac and Arabic Documents, ed. and trans. A. Vööbus. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 2:257, rightly judges the negative motivation behind the authority granted deaconesses to distribute communion: it was the mark of the unworthiness of the nuns that they were not to receive it at the hands of a priest. Cf. also Danielou, “Ministère des femmes.”

40. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 29, 30.

41. For a similar presentation, see J.-M. Fiey, “Une hymne nestorienne sur les saintes femmes,” *Anal. Boll.* 84 (1966): 77–110.

42. Febronia, *BHO*, 302–3; *BHG*, 208–9.

43. Our oldest manuscript dates back to the sixth century. The Syriac text is in *Vita Febroniae*, and an English translation is in *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, trans. S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, 150–76. Febronia’s cult remains popular to this day; cf. Gülcan, “Renewal of Monastic Life.”

44. Cf. the similar interchange in the martyrdom of Maḥya. I. Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najran*, Sub. Hag. 49 (Bruxelles, 1971), xix–xxii; translated in *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, trans. S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, 109–111.

45. Pelagia, *BHO*, 919; *BHG*, 1478–79. The Syriac text is in *Vita Pelagiae*, and an English translation is in *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, trans. S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, 40–62. It is unlikely that the Pelagia and Bishop Nonnus of our text can be identified with the courtesan mentioned by John Chrysostom, or

with the Bishop Nonnus of Theophanes, for reasons of lack of evidence in the former case and inaccurate chronology in the latter. See now the monograph, *Pélagie la pénitente*, ed. P. Petitmengin; and for a deeply sensitive treatment of her story and theme, Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*.

46. See Delehay, *Legends of the Saints*, 150–55; Delcourt, “Female Saints in Masculine Clothing,” in *Hermaphrodite*, 84–102; and Patlagean, “Histoire de la femme déguisée.”

47. “The Acts of Thecla,” *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:330–33, 353–64.

48. Consider, for example, Matrona of Constantinople (c. 425–524), *BHG*, 1221–23; the sixth-century Anastasia, *BHG*, 79–80, who seems to have been a correspondent of Severus of Antioch. When the Piacenza Pilgrim visited the Holy Land around 570, he not only visited Pelagia’s tomb but also reported a recent exploit like Anastasia’s; Piacenza Pilgrim, *Travels*, 34, ed. P. Geyer; also in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 78–89.

49. See the discussion in Patlagean, “Histoire de la femme déguisée.”

50. Fiey, “Une hymne nestorienne” (see n. 41 above).

51. For example, *Lives*, 1, *PO* 17:12; 4, *PO* 17:69–71. Compare the parallel case when John himself nearly died as a baby; *Lives*, 4, *PO* 17:61–64.

52. John claims the preponderance of females in need of exorcism without hesitation. See esp. *Lives*, 4, *PO* 17:65; and cf., for example, the cases in 1, *PO* 17:12, 14–15; 15, *PO* 17:223–28.

53. *Ibid.*, 44, *PO* 18:666–68.

54. *Ibid.*, 4, *PO* 17:63. Cf. Simeon the Stylite, who had the same rule; Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 26.21.

55. *Lives*, 47, *PO* 18:676–84.

56. See chap. 4 for detailed discussion.

57. *Lives*, 47, *PO* 18:683–84.

58. *Lives*, 15, *PO* 17:220–28.

59. The account of Jacob as unwilling exorcist is discussed in chap. 2.

60. *Lives*, 15, *PO* 17:225.

61. *Ibid.*, 226–27.

62. *Ibid.*, 228.

63. *Ibid.*, 226.

64. *Ibid.*, 56, *PO* 19:198–99.

65. *Ibid.*, 31, *PO* 18:578–85. Elijah and Theodore are discussed in chap. 2.

66. *Lives*, 31, *PO* 18:582–85.

67. *Ibid.*, 21, *PO* 17:290–93, 297–98.

68. Cf. McLaughlin and Ruether, *Women of Spirit*.

69. *Lives*, 12, *PO* 17:166–67; 27, *PO* 18:542.

70. *Ibid.*, 27, *PO* 18:541.

71. *Ibid.*, 28, *PO* 18:559.

72. Examples abound, perhaps most graphically in the *Gospel of Thomas*, Logion 114. Cf. *Vita Macrinae*, in Gregory of Nyssa, *Opera*, ed. W. Jaeger, 8.1.371; Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 9; Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 29; and, in the sayings

of Sarah, *Apophthegmata patrum*, PG 65.419–22 [and the additional Saying 9, in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. B. Ward (London, 1975), 192].

73. *Lives*, 12, PO 17:166–71. John does not title her “the Pilgrim,” but the label serves here to distinguish her from Mary the Anchorite, discussed later. The passages quoted from John’s text are my own translations.

74. *Ibid.*, 169.

75. *Ibid.*, 169–70.

76. *Ibid.* For miracles worked by presence rather than by will, cf. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 24.7.

77. See chap. 2; and *Lives*, 4, PO 17:56–84.

78. *Lives*, 12, PO 17:171–86. The passages quoted are my own translations.

79. *Lives*, 12, PO 17:171.

80. *Ibid.*, 174–75.

81. *Ibid.*, 175–76. Euphemia was not the only one of John’s ascetics who refused to take the sins of others upon herself. See also *Lives*, 4, PO 17:67; and 44, PO 18:665.

82. *Lives*, 12, PO 17:179–80.

83. *Ibid.*, 181.

84. *Ibid.*, 181. Compare the similar juxtaposition of Thomas and Stephen, *Lives*, 13, PO 17:187–213, discussed earlier in chap. 4.

85. See chap. 4; *Lives*, 27, PO 18:541–58.

86. Cf. Clark, “Piety, Propaganda and Politics”; and idem, “Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement.”

87. *Lives*, 27, PO 18:552–53.

88. *Ibid.*, 557.

89. *Ibid.*, 28, PO 18:559–62.

90. *Ibid.*, 560.

91. *Ibid.*, 562.

92. See chap. 3.

93. *Lives*, 28, PO 18:559.

94. For example, Patlagean, “Sur la limitation”; and esp. idem, *Pauvreté économique*, 113–55.

95. *Lives*, 44, PO 18:660–68.

96. *Ibid.*, 54, PO 19:185–91.

97. *Ibid.*, 54–56, PO 19:185–99; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 90.13.

98. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*. Cf. the studies collected in Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith*.

99. Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Select Letters*, 10.7.

100. There is a lacuna of a leaf or two in the manuscript at the beginning of John’s chapter about her; PO 19:186, and 186, n. 3. He may have included mention of her change in circumstance in the missing portion. But it also may not have been of concern to him, considering the situation in which he knew her—as an ascetic, within an ascetic community.

101. The suffering of members of the nobility who took up asceticism is a

recurring theme in hagiographical literature. Cf., for example, the case of Arsenius in the Egyptian desert of Scete, *Apophthegmata patrum*, PG 65.88–107. See also Clark, "Authority and Humility."

102. *Lives*, 54, PO 19:187.

103. *Ibid.*, 188. Cf. Melania's vast knowledge of patristics, Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 55.

104. Some of these are treated by John in *Lives*, 55–56, PO 19:191–99.

105. *Ibid.*, 54, PO 19:189.

106. *Ibid.*, 190.

107. *Ibid.*, 191.

108. Cf. Melania, who exploited her temporal position for the sake of the ascetics she so loved. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 46, 54. See also Clark, "Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement"; idem, "Authority and Humility."

109. *Lives*, 55, PO 19:191–96.

110. *Ibid.*, 192.

111. *Ibid.*, 193–95.

112. See the discussion in chap. 1.

113. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 28–30, 33–35, 37, 49, 69–70.

114. *Ibid.*, 5, 31, 60, 63–64, 69.

115. *Ibid.*, 9, 41, 46, 54–57, 61, 67.

116. *Ibid.*, 59. Amma Talis governed a convent of sixty women: "[These women] loved her so much that no lock was placed in the hall of the monastery, as in others, but they were held in check by their love for her. The old woman [Amma Talis] had such a high degree of self-control that when I had entered and taken a seat, she came and sat with me, and placed her hands on my shoulders in a burst of frankness" (*Palladius*, trans. R. T. Meyer, 140).

117. Again, Palladius states that the responsibility for sin is women's when in fact he also indicates that the fault is not theirs at all. Of Taor he says, "She was so graceful in appearance that even a well-controlled person might be led astray by her beauty were not chastity her defense and did not her decorum turn sinful eyes to fear and shame" (*Historia Lausiaca* 59; *Palladius*, trans. R. T. Meyer, 140). And on another excellent holy woman, "All the clergy confirmed that when she was a young maiden of about 20, she was exceedingly pretty and really to be avoided because of her beauty, lest one be suspected of having been with her" (*Historia Lausiaca* 63; *Palladius*, trans. R. T. Meyer, 144).

118. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 29, 30.

119. *Ibid.*, 29.

120. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 76, 88, 135–36, 152, 188, 207, 217. Chap. 128 speaks of women's weakness in the face of demons, and of their inability to lead others.

121. *Ibid.*, 3, 14, 19, 31, 39, 45, 60, 75, 78, 179, 189, 204–6.

122. *Ibid.*, 45–48, 50, 75. For discussion of the Marian witness of John Moschus, see Chadwick, "John Moschus"; and Vasey, "John Moschus, Monk

Marian Witness." John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 20, speaks also of the potency of Saint Thecla as intercessor.

## VII. John of Ephesus: Asceticism and Society

1. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vitae*, in Kyrillos von Skythopolis, ed. E. Schwartz. See also Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 3:1–3, *Les moines de Palestine*. Cyril's biographies record the lives of Saints Euthymius, Sabas, John the Hesychast, Cyriacus, Theodosius, Theognius, and Abraamius. On Cyril as a hagiographer, see, above all, Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*.

2. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, PG 87.3.2851–3112.

3. *Vita Euthymii* 6; *Vita Sabae*, Prologue.

4. Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 3.1:10, praises him for "une candeur charmante"; Cyril does, of course, use familiar hagiographical themes—for example, friendship with lions, divine protection, and temptation by Satan in the wilderness—that might be called "thematic stylization." But the presence of these incidents in no way undermines the historical integrity of his biographical narrative.

5. *Vita Euthymii* 41–60; *Vita Sabae* 77–90.

6. Cf., for example, *Vita Euthymii* 36, 40, 43; *Vita Sabae* Prologue, 6, 10, 15, 19, 27, 68, 77; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 5, 11; *Vita Kyriaki* 8, 10. For example, Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 3.1:42–44; *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 2.2, cols. 2687–90 (I. Hauscherr). On Cyril's use of dates, see, above all, Kyrillos von Skythopolis, ed. E. Schwartz, 340–55.

7. For example, *Vita Euthymii* 2, 16; *Vita Sabae* 1, 2, 9, 25; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 1, 3; *Vita Abraami*. Cf. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 89–90; and cf., for example, the parallel situations of the Cappodocian Fathers, especially Basil's network of contacts; and the situation in fifth-century Egypt. On Basil, see in particular *Saint Basile, Lettres*; and the discussions in Kopecek, "Social Class"; Ramsey, "Life in the Days of St. Basil the Great," in *Pauline and Other Studies*, 369–406; idem, "Noble Anatolian Family"; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*. On the Egyptian situation, consider the connections laid out especially by Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*; cf. Rousseau, "Blood-relationships." The *Vita Antonii*, and Theodoret in his *Historia religiosa*, both struggle to justify the presence of uneducated, lower-class ascetic leaders.

8. For the political context, see F. T. Noonan, "Political Thought in Greek Palestinian Hagiography (ca. 526–ca. 630)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1975).

9. *Vita Euthymii* 17, 25, 38, 44; *Vita Sabae* 11, 17, 58, 64, 66, 67; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 12; *Vita Kyriaki* 8, 9, 17; Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 126, 181–82.

10. *Vita Euthymii* 13; *Vita Sabae* 5, 14, 23, 34, 49; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 13, 18; *Vita Kyriaki* 10, 16.

11. *Vita Sabae* 25; *Vita Kyriaki* 18, 19.

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